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ABSTRACT

Popular films can be used successfully in a wide range of language, content, and culture classes. Creating support materials in order to use a movie in such a class is an enormous task, but with careful planning it can be broken into four manageable components: contemplation, selection, segmentation, and construction. This brief paper provides a step-by-step guide to selecting, securing, showing, and developing a productive lesson plan based on a popular film. Copyright issues are explained. One table and three references are included. An appendix--Developers' Checklist--is also attached. (Author/KFT)

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Developing Film Study Guides

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Popular films can be used successfully in a wide range of language, content and culture classes. Creating support materials in order to use a movie in such a class may, at first glance, seem an enormous task. It is! But, with careful planning, it can be broken down into four manageable components: 1) Contemplation, 2) Selection, 3) Segmentation, and 4) Construction. A Developer's Checklist to help navigate this process is available in the Appendix . The following paragraphs will provide explanations of and the rationale behind each of the issues raised in the checklist as well as examples from my own experience as a study guide developer.

Contemplation

The contemplation phase provides the opportunity to reflect on the learners, the teachers and the constraints of the situation in which the study guide will be used. Nation (1995) identifies the major goals in curriculum design involve maximizing the match between learner constraints, teaching orientations or principles and teaching constraints.

The Learners

One learner constraint involves the defining of learner needs that the course is meant to serve. In other words, what general language or other pedagogical needs do the learners as a whole have that this course can address? For instance, do the learners need training in academic English, or do they need task-based practice of specific situations or scenarios? The learners for whom I prepared my study guides were Japanese college freshmen enrolled in an integrated four-skills class with an emphasis on writing. Upon completion of the course, they were expected to be able to write grammatically accurate well-structured and supported paragraphs and short essays while gaining practice in reading, speaking and listening.

Learner needs are related to the second constraint, the learner language proficiency level. Obviously, many of the choices made in later sections of this checklist will depend upon the abilities of the learners and the range of abilities that are present in one intact group. As well as weakness in grammar, the learners in my situation had a very poor sense of paragraph structure, cohesion and

coherence. Furthermore, their vocabulary was quite limited -- they did not recognize or know the meanings of all 2000 words in West's (1953) *General Service List*.

A final learner constraint involves what the learner's perceive to be their goals in learning and what they want from the course. Are they interested in speaking practice? Are they interested in observing and learning about other cultures? In my experience, learners are generally enthusiastic about incorporating video in their learning but they are less articulate about how they want to go about it. The freshmen in this situation expressed a strong interest in American films and the use of video as a pedagogical resource. They wanted a situation in which they could spend class time listening and speaking and then concentrate on writing and reading on their own time. They expressed a preference for small group or pair work over whole class activities and wanted to use language to communicate ideas rather than to study and analyze language structure.

The Teacher(s)

The next challenge to the teacher material developer is how to match learner needs lacks and wants to the teacher's own orientations to teaching and to the situation. There are pedagogical choices that teachers must make that are intimately connected to their teaching orientations and beliefs about learning. They are in part based on the teacher's own beliefs/biases about what "works" and are shaped by knowledge of theory and current research. Three teaching orientations match what video has to offer. Video can provide **models** for target performance. Video is also a versatile information **resource**. Finally video is a context for language use; it can **stimulate production** of language by learners.

In my teaching, I use video in all three of these ways. However, for the study guide described in this paper, my decision was to use video primarily to stimulate production of language by learners. This was largely in keeping with students' expressed preference to use language to communicate meaningfully.

The Teaching Situation

Constraints of the teaching situation affect curriculum and materials design. A careful selection of video and appropriate design of support materials can respond to all constraints based on class size, motivation and learner level diversity.

Selection

The selection phase is concerned with choosing the target film, establishing an organizing principle for the study guide and deciding the number and nature of other information resources to be incorporated into the guide. The film for which the study guide is developed may or may not be the teacher's own choice. In my own experience, a separate committee selected and purchased the movie titles based upon what was available in the technological format (CAV LD) at the time. It became my task to make the most of the "hand that was dealt."

Delivery Systems

If the teacher is fortunate enough to have some control over selection, there are a number points to consider. First, the teacher/developer should try to pick a film that he or she personally likes since a lot of time will be spent watching and thinking about it. Second, consider the delivery format. For instance, **VHS tapes** are widely available, cheap and easy to use. Furthermore, most schools have VCR's either in their classrooms or portable units. However, the tapes do wear out with repeated use and copyright law does not support multiple copies. Furthermore, some tapes are copy-protected so an archive copy can not be produced.

DVDs are the new popular video technology that overcomes the problem of wear-and tear from repeated use. However there are a number of drawbacks with the technology in its present form. First, the available titles in Japan are quite limited and due to regional coding, DVDs purchased in the US do not run on many Japanese maker machines although that situation is changing. Second, they are meant for linear viewing--a fact that will present problems to be discussed in the section on segmentation.

Laser disks, like DVDs are inconvenient if they are in CLV format since they too are meant for linear viewing. Also, the number of available titles has decreased and not many institutions are installing or maintaining LD technology. Aspects of the materials that take advantage of the non-linear CAV laser disk technology (such as frame number search and multiple audio tracks; one for the film and one for a lecture on the film) can be rendered useless if an institution decides to decommission the machines.

In my case, the initial format provided was CAV laser disk in a high tech classroom although I have since adapted the study guide to be used in a conventional classroom equipped with a single video tape player and monitor. In the CAV LD room, every student had the option of viewing his or her own laser disk. Also, there was the option for up to three students to share one machine. This meant that I needed

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to spend some of my developmental time making a catalogue of scenes and corresponding frame numbers. In the end, this was very useful for directing students to the exact scenes (even exact turns in dialogue) and later this groundwork was useful for a DVD interface. As will be mentioned later though, it did affect the segmentation and presentation of some scenes.

Text Format and General Contents

It is important to envision the organizing principle that will underlie each unit of the study guide. For example, the classic structure is a pre-, concurrent-, post- viewing sequence. However, depending on the instructional focus (or focuses) of the course, the kinds of tasks or exercises included in each of these phases of the unit sequence may vary. Also, the developer needs to have some idea of whether space will be provided in the guide for users to respond (workbook style) or if the users would be expected to provide a notebook (handbook textbook style). Finally, the developer has the choice to include or exclude task directions (to the learner or to the user) if the developer wants to allow some flexibility in material exploitation.

As mentioned earlier, the CAV LD delivery system and the learner preferences affected the organizing principle in the study guide described here. I decided early to create a workbook style but to expect longer assignments to be submitted separately. Since "four skills with a writing focus" was how the course was advertised, I decided that the activity headers should reflect this. Therefore, the following headers were used to denote various activities:

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insert table 1 about here

Other Media Resources

An often-neglected consideration in the selection of feature films for language learning use is the availability of supplementary materials. Many films include interviews with the major actors, director or producer as well as director's cuts at the end of a VHS tape or in separate chapters on a DVD. Some special edition LDs and DVDs include scholarly commentary on the film as a second audio track. Also, novels that retell film stories as well as screenplays are widely sold. Furthermore, films may be allegories, parodies or satires of literature. Indeed films can be satires and parodies of other films, too. Internet websites, magazines and newspapers are all potential sources of supplementary information.

The two films used in my study guide, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *The Graduate*. I collected screenplays, novels, film reviews and articles by critics for a reference portfolio that the students had access to at various times during the semester to augment or assist in their writing assignments. The laser disk version of *The Graduate* had an audio essay by film professor Bernard Suber on a second sound track plus scenes from auditions and production photos. In the DVD version of *The Graduate* there is also a series of interviews with actors and production members that has been used by some students for extra information.

Segmentation

Segmentation involves reconciling time management with issues of evaluation/assessment, discourse/linguistic structures, and potential obstacles to comprehension. A first task is to map out the number of weeks and class hours available for viewing and responding to the film. It can be useful to write a tentative schedule including the date (or week number), topics/materials/scenes to be viewed, and assignment descriptions.

In my situation, one semester had an average of 12 weeks with one 90-minute teaching period per week. It was decided that one film would be used per semester. Also, the departmental requirement was four major writing assignments so this had to be spread carefully over the 12-week course.

Second, some thought must be given to the **density of information**. Although a film's genre will determine somewhat how information is distributed, generally, a large amount of information needs to be conveyed in a short time at the beginning of a film. The characters must all be introduced and established not to mention the setting (time and place). Also, the theme and plot are typically set in the opening few scenes. Therefore, the viewer has a lot to cope with in the early minutes of a film. Once these points are understood, the film story gets easier to follow (except in the case of suspense/mystery films that deliberately mislead and confuse). A general rule of thumb is to spend more time on the first quarter of the film (half of the total course time) and solidly acquaint the learners with the characters, the story line and thematic issues.

Evaluation/Assessment

The type and number of evaluations will depend largely on the instructional focus of the study guide. For example, if the focus is skill development with emphasis on writing, several writing

assignments will need to be spaced at intervals throughout the instructional period. If fluency is the goal, every class meeting must include or be built towards a range of communication tasks.

Discourse Structure

Scene segmentation is one step in analyzing the discourse structure of a film. A scene is a basic unit of division. Location and or the passage of time usually define a scene. Some very long scenes may be broken into topics (in the case of long dialogues) or events (in the case of chase and fight scenes). This can become a problem if DVDs are used since DVDs are meant for once through, linear viewing. It is both difficult and time consuming to find a specific episode in a film on DVD unless it occurs near the "chapter" breaks that placed in the film by the engineers that pressed the disk. Most chapters begin and end on natural scene boundaries but usually several scenes are contained within one chapter. This means that to find a scene within a chapter, the user must search manually. This is time consuming and imprecise, thus inconvenient for teachers.

It makes sense to list the scenes with a short description of the place, time, characters, topics and purpose. Scenes have a variety of purposes. Some merely introduce a character or establish the atmosphere of the story. Others serve as transitions form one place or time to another. Other scenes convey information as to the hero's dilemma, or the technical knowledge needed to understand the rest of the story. Knowing the purpose of the scene will assist in the design of activities to exploit it and will help the developer to decide how much time needs to be spent on it. Along with the scene description, it is also a good idea to list the interesting linguistic/discourse structures. This can include idioms and target vocabulary as well as speech acts or discourse routines.

Comprehension Hot Spots

Tatsuki (1999) <<link to http://www.aitech.ac.jp/~iteslj/Articles/Tatsuki-Movie.html>> identified two clusters of interacting factors that contribute to comprehension hot spots. One cluster has a strong acoustic basis and is similar to the sources of "slip of the ear" phenomena (Laufer, 1991). The other cluster seems to have a more cognitive or memory/attention basis. They can be said to be "interacting" because in some cases there appears to be more than one explanation for poor comprehension. This makes sense since films are "multi-modal" (Meinhof, 1998) texts in which moving and still images, music and sounds, written and spoken language are all combined in a tapestry of meaning. According

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to Meinhof, one goal in language learning is to enable a learner to "engage with texts made up of potentially conflicting verbal, visual and musical codes where the different codes may be in a contradictory relation to each other" (p.5).

Construction

Construction is predominately concerned with matching the features of specific scenes in the film with methods or techniques and then ensuring that methods and techniques support the instructional focus. For example, a long action scene can be used to encourage reading (order a series of descriptive sentences). The same scene can be used to elicit vocabulary (list the objects/actions from memory) or to stimulate oral production (tell your partner [who did not watch the scene] what you saw). The possibilities are nearly endless.

Conclusion

Creating a study guide for a feature film can be an exhausting but exciting learning process for the developer. One of the benefits of such an undertaking is that the materials are tailor-made for a group of learners. Also, if the developer is also the teacher, the amount of time invested pays off in a better appreciation and exploitation of what the film can offer to the learners. Finally, the time investment usually becomes expressed as enthusiasm for the film and a level of expertise that students will respect and respond to. Film resources have been too long neglected because of misplaced fears about copyright infringement. It is time for teachers and materials developers to claim for their students this rich learning resource.

References

Meinhof, U. (1998). *Language learning in the age of satellite television*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Nation, I.S.P. (1995). *Practical course design*. Tokyo: Temple University Japan.

West, M. (1953). A general service list of English words. London: Longman, Green and Company.

Table 1. Workbook headers, definitions and use

Skill Focus	Header	Definition and Use
Speaking	Talk About It	Opportunities for small group or pair conversations. Can be used as warm-up to activate learner knowledge of the topic, as a means of sharing opinions or jointly negotiating meaning and as a cool-down to close the session.
Listening	Listen For It	Can be used to practice global strategies (e.g. listening for gist) or through a specific focus (e.g. cloze, dictation or short-answer questions) a chance to listen for details.
Reading	Read About It	Short essays or articles that provide additional information on the film, the characters, the novel or social setting.
Writing	Write About It	Explicit directions for topic selection and assignment requirements.
Integrated	Study About It	Focuses on development of writing skill. May require reading, discussion in pairs or small groups and writing to complete a task.
	Think About It	Focuses on reinforcing or improving listening comprehension. May require reading, discussion in pairs or small groups and writing to complete a task.
	Watch For It	May focus on improving listening comprehension or on stimulating discussion. May require some reading, writing and discussion in pairs or small groups to complete a task.

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DEVELOPERS' CHECKLIST

	Question/Issue for Consideration	Developer's Response/Comment
CONTEMPLATION	Describe the learners or users of the guide. Age Levels Goals or Needs	
	Indicate the instructional focus or objectives. Vocabulary development/consolidation Grammar awareness./development Specific Skill training (LRSW) Communication Strategies Fluency/Practice Cultural Awareness Media Literacy	
	Describe the preferred methods and techniques. (e.g., Dictations/Cloze, Check lists, Role plays, Group/pair tasks, Problem solving Games, etc.)	
SELECTION	Was the target film ___? inherited (came with the institution) your own choice suggested or recommended to you on a curriculum list	
	Consider the format and general contents. What is the organizing principle? (e.g., pre-/concurrent-/post-viewing) What will be included? (e.g., Worksheets (respond in text), Assignment instructions, Transcripts)	
	Are other resources in film available? (e.g., related films, Interviews with director/actors, "making of" films, different films on same topic/by same director Are other related media resources available? (e.g., newspapers, periodicals, books, film-based novels, internet)	
SEGMENTATION	How many class weeks or hours are available? (e.g., class time, self access time, homework) What is the projected number and nature of assignments, tasks, and other evaluations?	
	Consider the discourse structure. What is the film's genre? Outline the basic story List the scenes noting length and focus. Describe the main and key supporting characters.	
	Can you predict any comprehension "hot spots"? Are there any linguistic models, examples, or other points of interest?	
CONSTRUCTION	Which techniques and methods match best with each scene's features?	
	Which techniques and methods match best with the instructional focus?	

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